

March is Colorectal Cancer Awareness Month

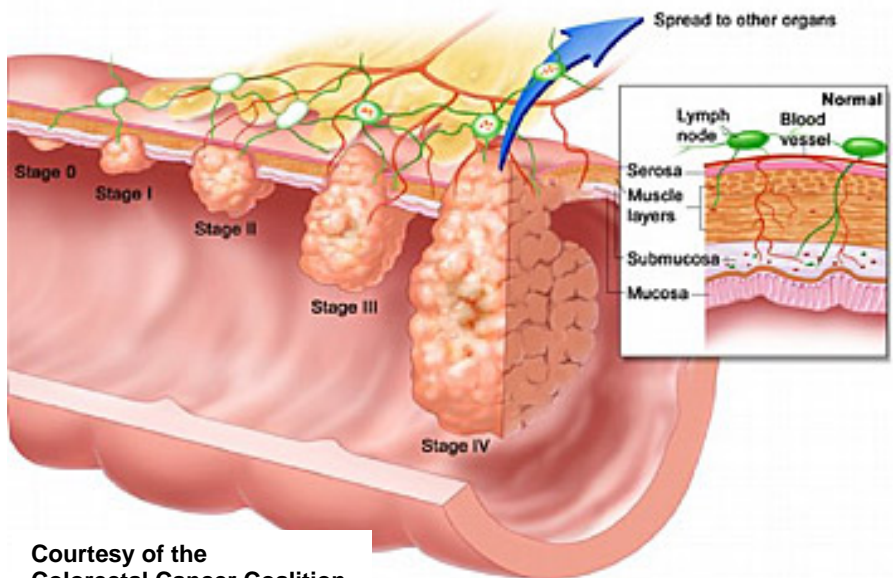
An important part of maintaining a healthy lifestyle is obtaining age appropriate health screenings. Colorectal "colon" cancer is one of the types of cancer that when detected early can often be stopped because it starts with a growth called a polyp that can be removed before it becomes cancerous. Colon cancer is most commonly diagnosed in men and women over age 50.

Once shunned as an invariably fatal, unmentionable disease, colorectal cancer has emerged as a highly treatable and even preventable or curable form of cancer.

Colorectal cancer is a major health problem, according to Dr. Curtis Baum, Director, Cotton-O'Neil Digestive Health Center in Topeka. It is the third most common cancer among both men and women in the United States. Asking for information about colon cancer testing isn't easy for everyone, but the [American Cancer Society](http://www.americancancer.org) can help. Individuals can call anytime, 1-800-ACS-2345 and receive confidential educational information about colorectal cancer and the options available for testing.

Ignorance of the facts necessary to prevent or detect the disease, paired with fear and embarrassment, has led colorectal to become the second leading cause of cancer death in the United States.

Approximately 145,000 new cases were diagnosed in the U.S. in 2005 and the American Cancer Society estimates that 56,290 people died from this disease in 2005. In Kansas, 7,466 Kansans were diagnosed with colorectal cancer and 2,790 died from 1997-2001. The number of cases diagnosed, however, is declining along with death rates.



Courtesy of the
Colorectal Cancer Coalition

About 75 percent of all new cases of colorectal cancer occur in individuals with no known risk factors except being over the age of 50. Regular screening is vital to saving lives and should begin by age 50, before any symptoms develop. Through screening tests, polyps or small growths on the lining of the rectum and colon can be detected and removed before cancer develops. Regular screening also permits cancer to be diagnosed at its earliest, most treatable stages. When diagnosed and treated in the localized stage, colorectal cancer has over a 90 percent five-year survival rate.

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Once thought to be a disease of white males, men and women are equally at risk for colorectal cancer, and African-Americans may be at increased risk of dying from the disease. Individuals with a personal or family history of inflammatory bowel disease, colorectal polyps, colorectal cancer or other cancer should discuss their risk and obtain screening recommendations from their physician. Because of increased risk African-Americans may need to begin screening earlier than age 50.

A sedentary life style and obesity also are associated with an increased risk of colorectal cancer, as are tobacco use, advancing age and a high fat-low fiber diet. In order to detect colorectal cancer while it is still treatable or curable, the American

Cancer Society recommends that people have an occult blood test yearly, a flexible sigmoidoscopy or double contrast barium enema every five years, or a colonoscopy every 10 years. The colonoscopy, which is performed under sedation, offers the advantage of allowing for the removal of polyps at the time of the procedure. Studies have shown that 80 percent of colorectal cancers arise from adenomatous polyps. The prevalence of these polyps increases with age, from 20-25 percent at age 50 to 50 percent by age 75.

Early detection and treatment of pre-cancerous polyps can reduce death rates from colorectal cancer significantly, while attention to modifiable life-style risks may help protect against this cancer.

Don't be fooled by how you feel physically because many patients diagnosed with both polyps and colorectal cancer do not have any symptoms.